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SUBJECT: REPARATIONS DECREE CONSULTATIONS GIVE VICTIMS VOICE IN PROCESS

REF: BOGOTA 955

Summary

¶1. The National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR) held ten regional consultations with hundreds of victims groups and the general public to discuss the draft reparations decree. The meetings provided victims an opportunity to voice their concerns and offer ideas to improve the reparations process. Participants in Cordoba and Sucre departments complained of ongoing violence by drug traffickers and called for the decree to provide larger cash payments (indemnities). CNRR emphasized efforts to include the widest pool of victims possible for reparations and implement a faster administrative process. USAID provided \$125,000 to support the consultations. End Summary.

Victims Speak Out

¶2. With \$125,000 from USAID, CNRR organized ten regional consultations in February and March to solicit comments from civil society on the new draft decree on administrative reparations. Strong turnout at events held in Bogota, Sincelejo, Bucaramanga, Medellin, Valledupar, Cali, Presto, Mocoa, Barranquilla and Quibdo underscored CNRR's commitment to involve victims in the reparations process. Between 500-700 people participated in the Medellin and Bogota meetings.

¶3. Monsignor Nel Beltran, a respected CNRR committee member and long-term advocate for victims in Sucre, launched the first consultation in Sincelejo on February 14-15. Beltran said "prompt, just and inclusive" reparations were key to reconciliation. Officials from the Human Rights Ombudsman Office, OAS, and the International Organization for Migration participated as observers. Other groups present included the Mothers for Peace, Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians, Association of Evangelical Ministries, and the League of Women. These reparations consultations -- the first of its kind in the country -- showed the CNRR's commitment to give victims' groups a voice in the process. Some victims' groups, such as the National Movement for Victims of the State, consider the CNRR to be illegitimate since it was created as part of paramilitary peace process.

Decree Needs Work

¶4. The victims viewed the decree as a positive step and expressed appreciation for CNRR's outreach efforts. Still, they complained that justice is "elusive" because they often do not know the identity of their perpetrators and even if they do, they fear reprisals. The decree calls for guarantees of "no repetition," but some participants said crimes were "already repeating" in Cordoba department. They gave high marks to the local Human Rights Ombudsman, Oscar Luis Herrera, but noted that criminal groups continue to exert influence in the region because it remains a drug corridor. Herrera confirmed that the area -- home to wealthy cattle ranchers connected to paramilitaries such as former AUC member Salvatore Mancuso -- and drug traffickers continue intimidating the civil population.

¶5. Most participants agreed with the decree's key provisions, but some raised concerns that it does not include victims of the military and police as well. They called for specific provisions for indigenous groups, minors, and victims of anti-personnel mines. The victims complained that many of the proposed reparation measures are humanitarian aid or economic development assistance that the state is responsible for in any case. They suggested indemnity (lump sum payment) be increased threefold from current projections (\$7500-10,000). Regional CNRR team leader Evelio Henao said the consultations were meant to promote debate over the decree's contents, but cautioned participants that the decree will not solve all social and economic problems.
Brownfield